

***After 1968: Contemporary Artists and The Civil Rights Legacy***  
**Pre-Visiting Material for Teachers**

**Introduction:**

This exhibit offers perspectives into the thoughts and methodologies of a group of ten emerging young contemporary artists. It was conceived in part to complement the High Museum of Arts in Atlanta's Road to Freedom (1956 ó 1968) photography exhibit depicting the civil rights movement, now at the Skirball Cultural Center here in Los Angeles. These artists were born in or after 1968, the year that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed in Memphis. These artists grew up knowing about the Civil Rights Movement and that awareness has shaped who they are and the art they make.

The focus was to process how the actions and ideologies of change represented in the civil rights movement continue to have relevance and influence upon subsequent generations of artists. These artists have been asked to speak to the realities of today. For many of the artists, it was their first museum acquisition, an important milestone in any artist's career. What is being said about America, "*After 1968*"?

**Themes:**

- (1). America is constantly shaping and reshaping its mores, social norms, laws, attitudes etc.
- (2). Social movements have been the means by which progress has been forged in America. (American colonists, abolitionist, suffrage, civil rights, gay rights, immigration reform)
- (3). After 1968, Black America became freer to express itself in ways that were authentic to Black culture and lifestyle.
- (4). After 1968, prejudice and discrimination were prohibited by law in America's institutions, housing, education, sports, entertainment, banking etc.

**Questions to think about:**

- (1). How has the civil rights movement affected America?
- (2). Do we live in a "post racial" society now that Barack Obama is President?
- (3). Who are the leaders that followed Dr. King, Malcolm X, Julian Bond, Thurgood Marshall etc. who continued the struggle for equality and eradicating prejudice and racism after 1968?
- (4). Is art a valid indicator of social change? Why or why not?

## The Exhibit:

**Stop #1 Artist: Adam Pendleton (b. 1980) *BLACK DADA*** (Dadaism represents an awakened movement of people, artist, poets,)

### Acrylic silkscreen on canvas

- Look closely at the painting, what shades do you see?
- What do you notice about the letters in the paintings?
- What do you think the letters and shading might represent in terms of the larger society?

**Stop #2 Artist: Deborah Grant (b.1968) *The Flaming Fury of Bayard Rustin the Queen at the End of the Bar*.** Bayard Rustin took a leading role in advancing universal civil rights. He opposed the violence and bigotry of segregated American institutions with direct non-violent tactics.



### Mixed media on enamel-painted birch panel – photographic images on panels

- Do you recognize any of the people in the artwork? Who are they?
- Why do you think the background is red?
- Why do you think the images are in rectangles of three in a row?
- Which panel jumps out at you? Take a moment to observe. Why do you think it is interesting or otherwise?
- What do you think is being said about, **After 1968** through this installation?

**Stop #3 Artists: Otabenga Jones & Associates - Jabari Anderson (b. 1973), Jamal Cyrus (b.1973), Kenya Evans (b. 1974) & Robert A. Pruitt (b.1975)**

***Grow Black Growth Action and Activity Book.***

**Mixed media in mail packet** - This group of artists wanted to discuss political events related to the plight of Blacks in America and abroad. The group sought to create a socially engaged aesthetic that reflected Black culture and experience.

**Their three point program in their own words:**

(1). *Expand the parameters of the aesthetic of the African Diaspora*

(2) *A directive to teach the truth to young Black youth*

(3) *To mess with whitey*

- In what areas of American society does each of the people depicted work?
- Does this look workbook like anything you have ever studied in school?
- What might all of these people have in common?

**Stop #4 Artist: Nadine Robinson (b. 1968) Coronation Theme: Organon Speakers and mix media sound installation.**



Nadine Robinson was born in England and raised in a Jamaican culture in the Bronx where music played a central role. It was a way to draw the village/community together. Through the speakers music and sound become a continuation of an artistic tradition. The mix of a cappella vocals and emotional sermons signify the central importance of prayer and faith to the civil rights era. The sounds include rushing waters, and excerpts of protest speeches. She was inspired by seeing footage of children being hosed in Birmingham, Alabama in Kelly Ingram Park, May 3, 1963. The speakers also symbolize youth. It was the youth of America who embraced taking speakers out of consoles and making them central in modern culture.

- What do you hear coming from the speakers? What do you think the sounds represent as related to the civil rights movement?

- Notice the structure of the art installation, what might its shape represent? (Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church where MLKjr was pastor.)
- What could speakers be symbolic of in the African American community, after 1968?

**Stops# 5, 6, 7 Artist: Hank Willis Thomas (b. 1976) *Unbranded:Reflections in Black by Corporate America 1968-2008 Series A, 2005-2008 Lightjet prints***

Thomas appropriates images from popular culture, usually advertising, and removes all original text or branding. Thomas then *rebrands* each image with new titles inspired by the ulterior meaning he sees revealed. In Thomas's words, his work is meant to "create insightful dialogues about community, commodity, violence, race, and branding in the twenty-first century."

- These advertisements appeared in popular publications over a period of 40 years through 2008. What are some of the recurring underlying themes?
- You may be familiar with some of these ads. Do you recall what products they were meant to sell?
- In what ways has corporate America shaped or perpetuated popular perceptions of African American culture?
- How have the advertisements featuring African Americans changed with time?

**Stop # 8 Artist: Leslie Hewitt ( b 1977) *Grounded* Cement, bricks and iron railing**



- With this sculpture, what is the artist telling us about the African American struggle? Think about the symbolism of stairs, the title and the materials used.

**Stop# 9 Artist: Jefferson Pinder (b 1970 ) *Juke* Digital video transferred to DVD**

**Definition:** Juke-West African/Gullah work meaning wicked, disorderly.

As video becomes increasingly the communication method of choice, more and more artists have been using it as an art medium. Jefferson Pinder uses video to explore misperceptions of race in a popular culture primarily driven by video.

- When you heard the songs the African Americans in the video were lip-synching to, were you surprised? Why?
- What does this video installation say about the origin and ownership of culture?
- Compared to the photographs in the exhibit how effective do you think video is in delivering the message of the artist?

**Stop#10 Artist: Leslie Hewitt *Make it Plain (5 of 5)*; Chromogenic print**

Source: make it plain ó Phrase from the Bible ò write the vision and make it plain.ö

Like the other artists in the exhibit Hewitt had no personal experience of the civil rights movements that occurred before her birth. Like most of her generation, her view of that period has been shaped by other's voices.

- In this photograph what provides a bridge to the historical past?

**Stop# 11 Artist: Jefferson Pinder *White Noise* Digital video transferred to DVD**

Definition: white noise- Sound containing a blend of all frequencies.

- Compare this video to Leslie Hewitt's sculpture *Grounded*.
- What are some of the comments that Pinder makes about the African American experience which are similar to Hewitt's work?

**Stop# 12 Artist: Leslie Hewitt *Riffs on Real Time( 4 of 10)*; *Riffs on Real Time (10 of 10)* Chromogenic print**

Definition: Riff ó Originally a jazz term meaning variations on a theme.

Leslie Hewitt is interested in how much of our memory relies on images. We rely on photographs to tell us a truth or revive a memory. Think about the snapshots you might have seen in your own family album or a photograph of an incident in the newspaper?

- How are memories and understanding of the past shaped by time?
- Will each person connected to the photograph ópersons depicted, the photographer or others viewing the photograph- recall the moment or incident in the photograph in the same way?

**GLOSSARY**

**Chromogenic prints** ó are color prints developed using a process introduced by Kodak in 1942. Before the advent of digital photography, the majority of the world's photography, private and commercial, was made this way. Colors are unstable over time either with exposure to light or storage in the dark.

**Lightjet prints** are color prints produced by a digital printer using red, green and blue lasers. The images are said to be sharper with excellent depth of color and are not subject to the fading and discoloration of conventional photography. Lightjet prints are estimated to remain stable for several decades.